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Acts 11:27-30

## Crisis Christianity

*27 Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.<sup>28</sup> And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).<sup>29</sup> So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.<sup>30</sup> And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.*

*(Pastor Prays)*

Last Tuesday night I had to preach at a church in Gastonia and had to be there by 6:30pm. I headed out Sugar Creek Road toward I-85 but ran into a detour where they are building that "bullet train." The detour put me off on Craighead Road – named after Alexander Craighead. He was a firebrand Presbyterian preacher. He was born in Ireland, traveled with the great revivalist George Whitefield (pronounced 'Whitfield'). His zealous preaching got him thrown out of Pennsylvania and Virginia and landed him here where he helped establish Rocky River Presbyterian and Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Churches. His belief was in a just God and an eternal Hell and a redeeming Christ. His belief that people were in crisis is what drove him much like it drove the church in our text and much like it must drive us.

The end of Chapter 11 brings us to a crisis. The influence of the Jerusalem church is waning and the church at Antioch is coming into its own. And in v. 27, the story before this, some of the prophets have come down from Jerusalem to Antioch; and in v. 28 one of them named Agabus (he will show up again later) tells the leaders at Antioch there's going to be a famine in the land. In v. 29-30 we see the church take quick action in a crisis situation.

Without me recounting all the junk that's going on locally and nationally and worldwide, I think it's fair to say we are in a crisis. But take heart, Christians were made for this crisis. God has us here because the world is in trouble and Christ is the answer. The truth is...

### **Christ Keeps Us Calm In Crisis**

How do we operate then?

### **We Are Concerned About Giving, Not Getting**

In the text, v. 27 & 28 are full of authentic bad news given by the Spirit, through a prophet. New Testament prophets were foundational like the Apostles in Ephesians 2:20 when Paul says the church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets.

Agabus was a New Testament prophet. He spoke with authority, and what he was saying was bad news: a worldwide famine. Now notice the reaction of the church in v. 29. *So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.*

The church in Antioch, they were concerned about the church in Jerusalem. They hear genuinely bad news and their biggest concern is about giving – not getting. I suppose it is a natural act in times of distress, trouble or danger to go into self-preservation mode. But a supernatural act would be for us to see the danger, understand the crisis and immediately think of others, to be concerned about giving, not getting, to be concerned about how you participate in some Gospel ministry of relief or repair or redemption.

One of the key Gospel indications that is so often ignored is *giving* and the desire to *give more*.

When Christ changes your heart, you let go of *things* and take hold of *Christ*. Isn't that what Paul said in Phil 3:8: *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ*

When you look at the cross and understand your new worth, it changes how you give within the confines of the church.

Giving should be at least 3 things: 1. Universal – Read the first part of verse 29 again: Every born-again believer redeemed by the blood of Christ ought to be giving to the mission and ministry of the church. Universal. Look, when I was growing up sitting in a dead church, my Dad put a quarter in my hand every Sunday to teach me that when the offering plate comes around, *give*. Christian giving is universal.

But it is also 2. Expected. In the text, there does not seem to be the compulsion or guilt or pressure, no arm-twisting. There is just the expectation. You've been bought by the blood of Christ. You live under the blessing of Heaven and you're dependent on the kind providence of a good God. To be a Christian is to *give* to the Gospel Ministry. Christian Giving is Universal. It is Expected and

3. Christian giving is calibrated. Read v. 29 again: everyone to their ability. Here is the principle of tithing from the Old Testament. The idea is set so that in the Christ-centered community, everyone can be a part of the supporting and partnering with the church ministry, rich and poor, and all points in between. This sort of radicalized giving presses beyond giving one-tenth or you asking questions of "net or gross?" This reaches into your heart and presses us to give in faith, trust and hope and to thrive in a crisis.

The Lord keeps us calm in a crisis, why? Because we are concerned about giving – not getting.

**We Make Decisions That Lead to Action**

Let me show you what I mean. In v. 27-29, they are told of a crisis. “ So the disciples determined” - now drop to v. 30 “and they did so.”

This story tells us they heard of a crisis, saw a need, made a decision and then took action. There are times in life when a need arises and you have to make a decision. Let me say, I believe 100% in praying through crisis but you don't have to pray about doing the right thing, the God honoring thing or the Christian thing.

The church at Antioch is what *we* must be. They were sound in doctrine, strong in love and quick to take action. Think about it now, this is a new church, made up of Greeks, not Jews. In fact, the Jewish church was slow to accept them as believers. They kept sending delegates to see if they really were believers and yet, in spite of the latent discrimination, the Jews brought them the Gospel and now the Greeks are sharing their goods.

You can never divorce Gospel truth from social action. God's word demands a response and our decisions have actions, and if the Gospel you believe is not translated into action, then you don't really believe it...You just like to read.

What James said is really true: Faith without works really is dead.

There must be more to our Christianity than denouncing homosexuality and abortion. There must be more to our Christianity than good doctrine and clear beliefs. Those beliefs must show up in how we live and the actions we take. Those beliefs must translate into marriages that stay together and neighbors who hear the Gospel and are ministered to. Our beliefs must translate into *Gospel* deeds, not just *good* deeds. Not just *social* work but *Gospel* work.

We do what we do because of who we believe in and what Christ has done to redeem us. We say with Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me."

You say you believe in Jesus? Have you been crucified with Christ so that no longer your personal inclinations or dreams drive you? Does Christ *really* live in you? This morning, I'm going to ask you to consider your Christianity. Is it working? Is your life marked by a radical difference from the world around you? Is Christ in you – the hope of Glory? Is that how you are known? Or are you just a nice person who goes to church?

We make decisions that lead to actions. You say you decided to follow Jesus? I would only say, “then deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow him.

Let's pray.

Before you can take up *your* cross, you must do something with *His* cross. The centerpiece of Christianity is the cross where the perfect Son of God, Jesus, took the punishment for sinners. He did it as a substitute. He died for sinners. Today I am asking you to drop your sins and sinful life at the cross and believe in Jesus, His perfect life and His death on the cross. Believe. Jesus said, "He who believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live." Come to Christ and believe.

*(Pastor prays)*

